The Migrant Mandate:

Missiology, Immigration, and the Local Church

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ABSTRACT

International immigration continues to grow at an unprecedented rate. While there are 244 million international migrants worldwide, The United States remains the most popular global destination, and now is home to one fifth of the world's migrants. This immigration boom brings unprecedented demographic shifts, cultural tensions, and political and missionary challenges. It could easily be argued that immigration is the social issue of this generation. With immigration in the national spotlight, an increasing number of causes, organizations, and disciplines are considering and studying the issue from their unique and often siloed perspectives. However, according to a recent study, less than 2% of Evangelical Christians, and similar numbers of Christians in other faith traditions, report being influenced on immigration by their local church, scripture, or national Christian leaders. There is a clear negligence in Christian instruction on this issue. This paper argues that as an inherently interdisciplinary and transnational field of study, missiology is uniquely equipped to understand and elucidate the complex issue of immigration. Therefore, missiologists have the responsibility to lead, teach, and equip the local church in the United States to understand immigration in their midst, respond to the holistic needs of immigrants, and to partner with immigrant believers as equal partners in the Kingdom.

THE AGE OF MASS MIGRATION

Migration has been constant throughout human history—people have always moved in search of food, space, wealth, power, and peace. However, this ancient practice was revolutionized in the mid-17th century by the widespread expansion of the newly-formed Western European states (Cohen 1995: 126). Colonialism prompted waves of multi-directional migration. European soldiers, sailors, and merchants moved within Europe and throughout the world, African slaves were forcibly transplanted to the Americas, and indentured servants were brought to China, East Africa, Fiji, and the Americas. (Castles and Miller 2009: 80-3). An influx of capital poured into Europe from around the world, sparking industrial revolutions and innovations in manufacturing and technology (Castles and Miller 2009: 4). The rise of urbanization and wage labor, coupled with increasingly affordable transportation, led to an unprecedented movement later named "The age of mass migration" (Hatton and Williamson 1998: 3).

During this period (1850-1914), 55 million emigrants left Europe for the New World, with the majority (33 million) settling in the United States (Hatton and Williamson 1998: 7). This was mainly a time of *free migration*, as there were virtually no restrictions on immigration in the United States until the late 1880's. Even after the first regulations were introduced, Europeans and Latin Americans were exempted from the rules until after the "age of mass migration" ended in 1920. (Castles and Miller 2009: 84-5). According to the census from that year, there were 13.9 million foreign-born people living in the country, an all-time high of 13.2 percent of the total population, codifying the myth that America was a "nation of nations" and a "permanently unfinished society" (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: xxiii, Briggs 1984: 77). From this point on, the United States would be considered the "most important of all immigrant countries" (Castles and Miller 2009: 84).

This distinction, however, did not slow the waves of nativism and prejudice. The incredible growth of the 19th century was significantly curtailed by a series of reactionary policies and restrictions enacted in the early 1920's. (Castles and Miller 2009: 85). The immigration system was designed to allow immigrants only from "desirable" nations who were expected to easily assimilate into the United States

(mainly Western Europe). Consequently, in 1970, the foreign-born population in the United States had shrunk to 9.6 million, a mere 4.7% of the national population—the lowest percentage in American history (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: xv). The period of "restricted immigration" lasted until the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 that introduced major shifts in immigration policy (Miller and Miller 1996: 10). The bill abolished the old national origin quota system from the 1890's that had prevented most immigration from Asia and certain parts of Europe. Driven by these legal changes, increasing globalization, and worsening economic conditions in nearby nations, the years following 1970 brought a new wave of immigration, increasing the foreign-born population fourfold from 9.6 million to 37 million in 2006 (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: xvi). Different from any other period, the majority of these "new immigrants" were Hispanic, Caribbean, and Asian (Schrag 2010: 163). The most current figures, based on the 2010 census, estimate that there are 40.4 million immigrants living in the United States, comprising 13% of the population. This is only .2% lower than the all-time high from 1920, and the influx of immigrants is only expected to rise (Pew Hispanic Center 2013: 2).

"ILLEGAL" IMMIGRATION

Immigration from Latin America grew exponentially in the years following the Immigration Act of 1965. The largest group of the "new immigrants," Latinos comprise 50% of the total immigrant arrivals since 1965, with Mexico as the single largest migrant-sending nation (Passel and Cohn 2011: 10). While in the 1940's only 354,804 Hispanic immigrants entered the United States, that number soared to 3.5 million annually in the 1980's (Miller and Miller 1996: 13). In 2010, there were 50.5 million Latinos in the United States, making up 16% of the total population. This was a 43% growth rate over the decade (from 35.3 million in 2000), accounting for a majority of the nation's overall population growth, including native births (Passel, et al 2011: 1). Many of these immigrants came to the United States without legal papers, forming a rapidly growing group of undocumented workers. As of 2011, there were an estimated 11.2 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Passel and Cohn 2011:1).

Ironically, illegal immigration soared after the passage of The Immigration Act of 1965. While eliminating the archaic country quotas, the law established a "single ceiling" on the total number of immigrants allowed into the United States

worldwide (Miller and Miller 1996: 21). Under this restriction, "no-preference" visas were no longer available for anyone. Thus, the only migrants allowed legally into the US were family members of U.S. citizens or permanent residents, those possessing specific skills, education, or experience needed by employers, and political refugees. "A massive backlog of potential migrants grew immediately," and the *only* way this excluded group could enter the U.S. was illegally (Miller and Miller 1996: 21). The weaknesses of this immigration policy, coupled with the economic suffering of the nearby Central American economies, led to a "system of increasingly organized illegal immigration" (Schrag 2010:164). Not surprisingly, just five years after the passage of the act, illegal immigration was widely considered "out of control" (Miller and Miller 1996: 22).

CURRENT INTEREST AND CONCERN

As the historical percentages show, the United States is currently experiencing immigration "growing pains" in truly unprecedented ways. Although the current levels are close to the per capita levels of 1920, the overall number is drastically greater, and immigrants are increasingly moving into small, rural communities for the first time ever. Furthermore, the system of illegal immigration which was all but impossible in the 1920s, has captured the fear and anger of many. More Americans are coming face to face with real immigrants, and they are more concerned about the perceived problems and challenges than ever.

A 2015 Gallup poll revealed that for the first time in 8 years, Americans ranked "immigration" as one of the top four problems facing their nation. Despite the concern, 68% reported that they still believed that immigration was a "good thing" rather than a "bad thing" for the country (Newport 2015: 1-3). However, 39% said that they worried about illegal immigration "a great deal," and only 33% are satisfied with how the government is dealing with the issue (Newport 2015:1). A further "77% of Americans said it was 'extremely' or 'very important' that the government take steps to control U.S. borders in order to halt the flow of illegal immigrants" (Newport 2015: 2). As the researcher concluded, "there is a clear distinction between the issue of illegal immigration and those coming across the nation's borders without permission, and legal immigration, which continues to be viewed positively" (Newport 2015: 3).

ACADEMIC INTEREST

In addition to "average Americans," this growing interest in immigration is also influencing the zeitgeist of academic research. Since the beginning of the "age of mass migration," scholars within the social sciences have focused their attention on immigration. There are generally two sets of questions that surround this phenomenon. Demographers and economists consider the first: "Why does migration occur and how is it sustained over time?" (Heisler 2000: 77). Sociologists and anthropologists focus on the second: "What happens to the migrants in the receiving societies and what are the economic, social, and political consequences of their presence? (Heisler 2000: 77). However, Brettell and Hollifield, the editors of *Migration Theory- Talking Across Disciplines*, contend that in recent times an unprecedented amount of scholars "have turned their attention to the study of this extraordinarily complex phenomenon," resulting in a "volume of research interest in a host of (new) academic fields" (2000: 1). Criminology, clinical therapy, law, medicine, gender studies, political science, and even theology are among the disciplines who have finally decided to join the "immigration game."

Despite the recent growth in these and other disciplines, migration theory and research have existed longest in sociology, emerging soon after the development of the discipline in the United States. Through the years, sociology gave birth to often contradictory perspectives like the (now maligned) "assimilation theory," "Americanization theory," Portes and Zhou's concept of "segmented assimilation," the "ethnic enclave model," and multiculturalism. Despite their unique conclusions, all of these models shared the perspectives and presuppositions of their discipline. Sociologists work "almost exclusively in the receiving society," and base their theories around that research (Brettell and Hollifield 2000: 4). When studying a complex phenomenon like migration that involves many contexts, this focus is myopic. Furthermore, without interacting with and learning from the contributions of other disciplines, the subconscious presuppositions of sociology limit its perspective significantly.

INTERDISCIPLINARIANISM AND THE BIRTH OF TRANSNATIONALISM

This tendency also applies to the other social sciences involved in immigration research. Each discipline approaches the issue squarely within their uniquely specific perspective and interest. As sociologist Douglas Massey and colleagues summarized, "Social scientists do not approach the study of immigration from a shared paradigm, but from a variety of competing theoretical viewpoints fragmented across disciplines, regions, and ideologies" (1994: 700-1).

In 2000, a diverse group of scholars produced *Migration Theory- Talking Across Disciplines* to address this problem. According to the editors, they desired to bring together leaders from various fields because without an interdisciplinary approach, "research on the subject tends to be narrow, often inefficient, and characterized by duplication, miscommunication, reinvention, and bickering about fundamentals" (Brettell and Hollifield 2000: 2). As "migration is a *subject that cries out for an interdisciplinary approach*," it is incredibly important that each discipline, which brings "something to the table, theoretically and empirically," work together to create a more "unified field of study" (vii).

Recently, more and more scholars have recognized the myopia and other inherent problems within the main field, and "reality-establisher" of immigration research—sociology. Leading transnational migration theorist Peggy Levitt readily admits that "Sociology has been in the service of the nation-state since its inception" (2007: 130). With a narrowly national focus on immigrant incorporation, sociology traditionally ignored the complexity of this phenomenon by opting instead for studies on "how to make Americans out of newcomers" (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007: 130). Recent discoveries and developments in other fields like anthropology, history, and economics shed light on the immigration process, revealing that it was never as simple or uniform as previous scholars had predicted (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007: 130). This led to the formulation of transnationalism as an interdisciplinary theory by which to understand migration in a globalized world.

In the landmark work *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Post-colonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, a diverse group of anthropologists share how they "discovered transnationalism" as they compared similarities in their research (Basch, Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994: 7).[1] Studying immigrant groups from around the world, these researchers found that their subjects were increasingly contradicting the dichotomist categories of "immigrants" and "those who stay behind."[2] Rather than severing preexisting ties as assimilation theory contended, these immigrants had households, economic activity, political involvement, and *identities* that spanned across one or more nation-states (Basch, Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994: 5). Furthermore, these social and political experiences were not "fragmented" as the existing paradigm would have suggested. Rather, these activities, although spread across national boundaries, constituted a "single field of social relations" (Basch, Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994: 6). Lacking proper terminology, Basch employed the terms "transnationalism" and "transnational social field" to describe what she was seeing (1994: 5-6).

Beginning with this removal of the "blinders of methodological nationalism," Levitt and Schiller introduce a "transnational social field perspective on society" (2008). A social field is a "set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" (Levitt and Schiller 2008: 182). These authors recognize that individuals within these fields are influenced, in their daily lives, by "multiple sets of laws and institutions" (2008: 189). Their relationships, activities, and even identities respond to state(s) as well as social/cultural institutions, such as religious groups, that exists within many nations and across borders (Levitt and Schiller 2008: 189). To further explain this perspective, Levitt and Schiller propose a view of society and social membership that distinguishes between "ways of being and ways of belonging" (2008: 187). Ways of being are simply the concrete social relationships and practices that people engage. Ways of belonging are practices

1 Basch, Schiller, and Blanc admit that this "discovery" happened independently at the same time as others were coming to the same conclusions. Furthermore, even before the development of the term, scholars had observed the "circulation of populations between home and host society" (1994: 7).

2 Anthropologists were able to overcome the weaknesses of sociology because they did not limit their research to the receiving society. With a dual field approach that focused on both the sending and receiving contexts, anthropologists were the first group to recognize the signs of transnationalism (Brettell and Hollifield 2000: 4).

that "signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group" (Levitt and Schiller 2008: 189). Transnational migrants forge various combinations of ways of belonging and being to carve out social space in their new contexts (Levitt and Schiller 2008: 189-190).

GOD NEEDS NO PASSPORT

Peggy Levitt encourages scholars of migration to operate with a "transnational gaze," beginning "with a world that is borderless and boundaryless" and then explore "what kinds of boundaries exist, and why they arise in specific times and places" (2007: 22). Following her own advice, Levitt found herself in an area that had been ignored in the social sciences for a long time— religion. Social scientists in general, and migration theorists specifically, have long overlooked the impact and power of religion. Religion was traditionally grouped together with "culture," and it was assumed that the importance of religion would fade in importance as nations modernized (Levitt and Jaworsky: 140). This *secularization theory* assumed that the whole world would follow the pattern of rapidly-secularizing liberal nations in Western Europe. By the end of the 20th century, most intellectuals "had little doubt that modern man had outgrown God" (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009:12). Blinded by their own notions of objectivity, researchers simply projected their "modern" Western values and notions of progress on those whom they studied.

Time has proven this hypothesis an utter failure. Rather than wane in influence, religion has actually surged around the world—religious faith and institutions remain vital to "many, if not most, persons in the modern world" (Hirschman 2008: 392). Although building for years, it took significant time for observers and scholars to overcome their presuppositions and take note of what was happening.[3] For example, in the millennial issue of *The Economist*, the publication printed an obituary for God to symbolize the current trends. Just nine years later,

3 "Little of substance has changed. The only thing that has happened is that the political classes in the West are waking up, rather late, to the enduring power of religion" (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009: 19-20). One of the reasons for this myopia was that sociologists were mainly focused on Europe and other bastions of secularism, while ignoring the "rest of the world" (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009: 19).

two editors of the same magazine published a massive treatise declaring that *God is Back* (2009: 12).

Using China and Russia as chief examples, these authors detail how religion has exploded in growth *and* public importance in even the most unexpected places (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009: 1-13). Christianity in particular has seen incredible growth in the last century, chiefly across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Religiosity is even growing in the secular nations of Europe. In a completely unexpected turn, Pentecostalism is now the fastest growing faith in France (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009: 14). Contrary to previous "fact," modernity and progress do not threaten religion. Religion is thriving in most modernizing countries, and is actually utilizing the tools of modernity to spread its own message. As the authors of *God is Back* concluded, "The very things that were supposed to destroy religion—democracy and markets, technology and reason—are combining to make it stronger" (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009: 12).

In addition to the continued importance and practice of faith worldwide, religions are also central to the discussion of globalization and transnationalism. As indicated in the title, *God Needs No Passport*, Peggie Levitt argues in this work that "religion is the ultimate boundary crosser" (2007: 12). Religious institutions and faiths are founded on universal claims and have always been worldwide in scope. Most major religions spread rapidly through migration, forming some of the first transnational communities in history (Levitt 2007: 12-13, Leonard 2005: 24). Co-religionists join to form cohesive communities that transcend racial, ethnic, linguistic, and national borders (Poewe 1994: xii). For example, in a study of global Christianity, editor Karla Poewe concluded that the best way to understand this phenomenon was not as a *religion*, but as a *global culture* that spans millennia and is "found in indigenized forms in all parts of the world" (1994: xii).

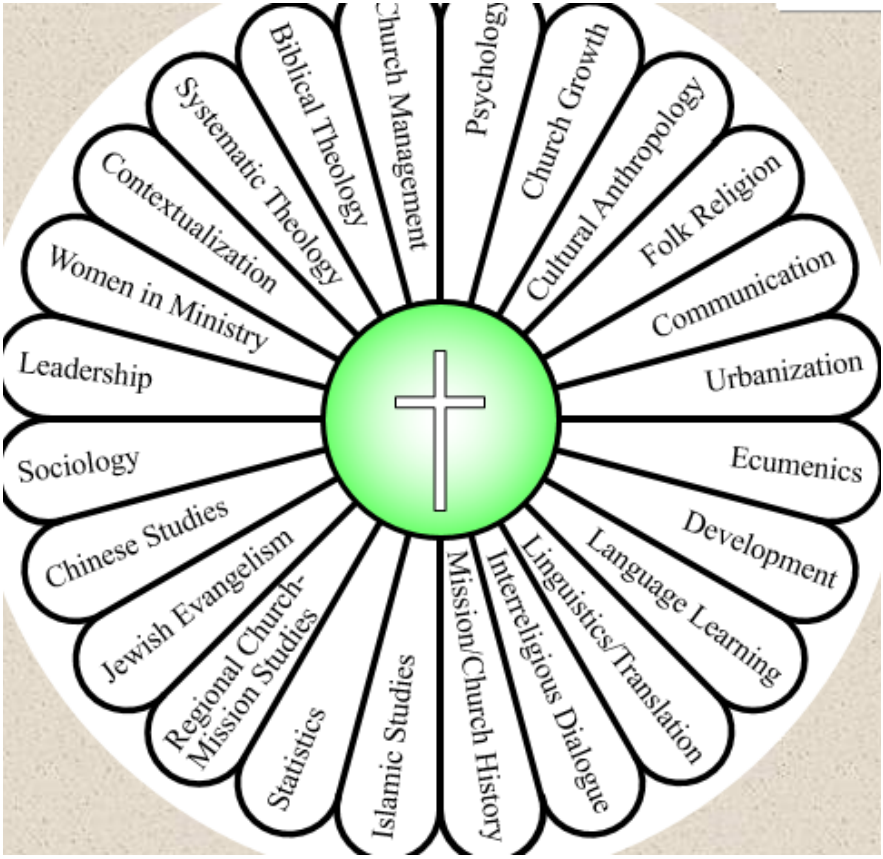
The inherently *transnational* function of global religions encourages, sustains, and influences the lives of today's migrants. Religion is so central "to the immigration experience" that historian Timothy Smith conceptualizes it as a "theologizing experience" (Smith 1978: 1175, Hagan 2008: 5). These travelers use religious institutions to "engender universal identities" and "live their transnational lives" in foreign and hostile places (Levitt 2003: 848). Religions are especially equipped for this task because they connect immigrants to *their* culture and

homelands, but also to fellow believers around the world and throughout history (Levitt 2007: 13). As Levitt concludes, "It is time we put religion front and center in our attempts to understand how identity and belonging are redefined in this increasingly global world (2003: 870).

MISSIOLOGY: UNIQUELY EQUIPPED

Throughout the previous summary of the developments in academic research and discussion on immigration, I have argued a few key points. The best way to consider the complex issue of immigration is to implement an *interdisciplinary approach,* operate with a "*transnational gaze*," and seriously consider the forgotten area of *religion*. Considering these three requirements, I would contend that missiology is one of the most uniquely equipped fields of study to understand immigration.

In his article "What is Missiology," Ross Langmead explains that while all theological branches have "conversation partners" in other disciplines, missiology has by far the most (2014: 75). He goes as far as to argue that missiology is not even really a discipline "because it is so intertwined with other disciplines." Rather than a discipline, missiology is "a field of knowledge, unified by its common interest and a community of scholars, drawing readily on a range of disciplines" (Langmead 2014: 76). Although missiology obviously has its own presuppositions and end goals, in its very nature it is "thoroughly and willfully interdisciplinary" (Langmead 2014: 76). Charles Van Engen also explains missiology as both "multidisciplinary and centered" (2011). With Jesus at the center, missiology draws from "many skills and many different bodies of literature" (Van Engen 2011) (see diagram below).



While other disciplines have to intentionally work hard to overcome the limitations of their academic ghettos, missiology inherently exists across a range of disciplines, giving it a unique advantage on the issue of immigration.

According to Levitt and Schiller, the ability to engage the complexities of immigration requires a complete "reformation of the concept of society" (2008: 182). They explain further: "Our analytical lens must necessarily broaden and deepen because migrants are often embedded in multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields, encompassing those who move and those who stay behind. As a result, basic assumptions about social institutions such as the family, citizenship, and nation-states need to be revisited" (Levitt and Schiller 2008: 182). Although this has traditionally been a weakness in the discipline of sociology, the inherent

worldview of missiology is one committed to a borderless and transnational community of people who despite their differences are united by an ultimate and permanent identity that transcends far beyond nations or even cultures. In other words, while other disciplines might have to work hard to adopt a "transnational gaze," missiology begins with this perspective.

Finally, missiology is uniquely able to understand an essential area of immigration studies that has been so often ignored or misunderstood by other social sciences—religion. Levitt calls for religion to be put "front and center" in this discussion as it is so often a source of identity and meaning for those "in-between spaces," and although that might be a radical call for other academics, missiologists have always included religion and spirituality as an essential part of understanding culture and people. Beyond simply considering religion, missiologists respect and can identify with the religious and supernatural worldviews of those whom they study, unlike so many academics who are blinded by an anti-supernatural bias. For example, both *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* and *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* are lauded works written by Christian authors who are well-respected within "secular" institutions. However, how likely would it have been for secular researchers to yield the same penetrating and emic results? As a research issue, immigration is somewhat unique in the extent that religion plays a central role—giving missiology a unique advantage in the field.

MISSIOLOGY: UNIQUELY RESPONSIBLE

In his controversial work *Education is Worthless*, Professor Daniel Cottom argues that one of the biggest problems with traditional education is that it "leads us away from practicality" (2003: 2). Although a cliché, the image of an ivory-tower is often true, and as Cottom adds, "we all know that the more educated people are, the more they prefer theory-building, generalization, and creative insight over the transmission of practical skills" (2003: 2). In addition to being interdisciplinary, Langmead contends that missiology is an inherently practical theology, "situation-based" and "shaped by immediate issues, and ideally, (it) shapes our response to those issues" (2014: 75). Missiology does not exist for itself—missiologists are to model and lead the Christian community on how to think critically, strategically, and in a Christian way about how the issues in our world affect the calling and mission of

the Church. Missiology should be more about praxiology than orthodoxy—if the discipline is not affecting the beliefs or behavior of the overall community of faith, it is failing.

Given this criteria, how does missiology fare on this issue of immigration? In 2015, LifeWay Research conducted an extensive poll on Evangelicals and their perspectives on immigration. To the question "Which of the following has influenced your thinking most on immigration?," the top three answers were: "immigrants I have interacted with" (17%), "friends and family" (16%), and "the media" (16%). The three *lowest* answers were: "your local church" (5%), "teachers or professors" (1%), and "national Christian leaders" (<1%) (LifeWay Research 2015: 16). Furthermore, only 1 in 5 of those polled said they had ever been encouraged by their church to reach out to immigrants, and only 53% were familiar with what the Bible taught about immigration (LifeWay Research 2015: 17-18). These results mirror a 2010 Pew Religion & Public Life study that found that only 9% of Protestants and 7% of Catholics report that religion is a "major influence" in their views on immigration. The same study found that religiously unaffiliated people are the most likely to express "positive views of immigrants," and white Evangelicals are among those "expressing the least favorable views of immigrants" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2010).

While missiology is uniquely gifted to study and understand immigration, it is clear that this has not been "trickling down" to the greater Christian community. If the local church, the Bible, or one's faith are not central in a Christian's understanding of a hot-button issue like immigration, something else will fill the void, providing the value-laden lens with which they see the world—be it media, family, personal experiences, or political views. Furthermore, this is not simply about "understanding an issue" from a holistic and Christian perspective—this lack of understanding necessarily influences our behavior toward immigrants—the way we think about them, the way we treat them, and the way that we reach out to them (or don't) in Christian mission, fellowship, or partnership. With unique capabilities comes unique responsibility. It is time for missiologists to escape the ivory-tower and use their knowledge to directly impact the way that the greater Christian community understands and engages the issue of immigration. In the following section, I argue that the most effective way to do this is for missiologists to be active practitioners, teaching, leading, and equipping the local church by engaging

actual congregations, facilitating bridge-building, and influencing denominations and networks.

ENGAGE ACTUAL CONGREGATIONS

From 2013 to 2015, I worked as the Southeast Regional Mobilizer for the Evangelical Immigration Table, a coalition of Evangelical groups advocating for "immigration reform consistent with Biblical principles." Although we had a clear political goal in mind, the overarching goal of our team was to engage local churches and Christians to help them better understand the issue of immigration (both factually and Biblically) and challenge them to respond to immigrants as Jesus would. I spent time in churches all over the Southeast—from college groups to senior citizens, from Presbyterians to Pentecostals, from Georgia to Virginia. It was an amazing opportunity to teach and speak to pastors and *real* Christian people about an incredibly controversial subject.

In virtually all of my encounters, I was met with gratitude by people who wanted to learn more, who were touched by Biblical teaching on immigration, and who had their perspectives completely changed within a few hours. Many expressed frustration that they had believed common misconceptions about the issue that had angered and troubled them—relieved by the truth, they talked about repenting from attitudes of bitterness and seeking out immigrants in their neighborhoods with the love of Jesus. In the range of responses, there was a question that was particularly common: "Why hasn't anyone told me this before?" This is mirrored in the 2015 Lifeway poll where although almost all respondents said they had never heard teaching on immigration, 68% said they would "value hearing a sermon that taught how biblical principles and examples can be applied to immigration" (20).

For academics, it is perhaps more natural to commission polls, do studies, and bemoan the problems of the "local church" from above—it is always easier to criticize than to construct. However, although seemingly obvious, the best way to influence the thinking and behavior of the local church is to spend time with *actual local churches*. Dr. Daniel Carol Rodas of Denver Seminary is an excellent example of this kind of engagement. Although not technically a missiologist, this Old Testament professor spends large amounts of time teaching on immigration to local churches from a decidedly missiological perspective. Passionate about

influencing how Christians view the issue, he had done this through his excellent book *Christians at the Border* (appropriate for lay audiences), and he has repeatedly made himself available to speak at churches whenever available, free of charge. I have worked with Dr. Rodas at several events with local churches, and he does an excellent job applying his insight and expertise to the "real world."

FACILIATE BRIDGE-BUILDING

Although teaching on immigration is an important place to start, presenting this information in a vacuum can potentially lead to well-intentioned stereotyping or patronizing rhetoric and plans to "help" or "save" the immigrants in question. To truly begin to understand the complexities of immigration, majority-culture Christians must humanize immigrants, seeing them as the people and the (oftentimes) brothers and sisters in Christ that they are. With the explosive growth in immigrant congregations nationwide, missiologists have an incredible opportunity to facilitate transformative bridge-building between different congregations and individuals.

In my experience, the most powerful events with local churches were when we brought together mainstream English speaking churches with immigrant congregations. Many people were able to come face-to-face for the first time with the "other," humanizing those who are too often thought of in terms of numbers, figures, problems, or mission "targets." Through worship songs, prayer, and testimonies, many shared how touched they were by seeing their similarities and their common bond in Christ. True bridge-building will go far beyond one-time events and worship gatherings. Ideally, these initial connections will transform into genuine relationships—which is the only setting in which one can truly understand or empathize with the immigrant experience. They also can facilitate Gospel partnerships between groups—which are exciting possibilities and an important step in moving beyond the traditional perspective of viewing immigrant groups as those to be "missionized," rather than those to be agents of mission.

The *Knoxville Internationals Network*[4] is an excellent example of a group that is building bridges and leading local churches in their city on the issue of immigration.

4 For more information on KIN and the work they are doing, visit www.kin-connect.org.

Led by Carol Waldo and championed by former missionary Joyce Wyatt, KIN is making amazing strides by engaging *actual congregations* of all types. As often is the case, it is not always "professional missiologists" who pioneer innovative ways of engaging tough issues. By developing relationships with almost every immigrant congregation in the greater region, KIN has hosted "international worship nights" where anyone can come worship together, build relationships, and learn about the cultures in their city. This has led to an amazing movement of Christian unity among these different congregations, and a dedication by many influential churches in the area to teach biblically on immigration, partner with immigrant churches, and work together to serve refugees and advocate for the physical, social, and political needs of the vulnerable immigrant community of Knoxville.

INFLUENCING DENOMINATIONS AND NETWORKS

For missiology to lead the local church on the issue of immigration, it is essential to be grounded in the practice of engaging actual congregations. However, in order to cover the most ground and influence the most people, missiologists must work at denominational and network levels, influencing, teaching, and equipping leaders who help decide the vision and direction of countless local churches across the nation. Again, this requires "missiological practitioners" with a passion to influence their denominations or networks with their knowledge and expertise.

When I was working with local churches across the South, oftentimes the only reason I would hear back from a pastor or be invited to share in a service was because of the denominational partnerships that the Evangelical Immigration Table had established. For better or worse, local churches are often marked by fierce tribal-like loyalties to their own denominational organs (ex: Wesleyan Church in America) or network allegiances (ex: The Gospel Coalition). In these cases, churches and pastors are wary to accept the teachings or perspectives from an "unaffiliated outsider," especially when it concerns a controversial issue. For this reason, it is incredibly important for missiologists to yield influence within their own spheres of influence, offering teaching and developing tools that will eventually "trickle down" to the congregational level.

For example, Dr. Juan Martinez of Fuller Seminary is very involved in research and teaching on the issue of immigration, but his involvement doesn't

end in the academy. Martinez is very active in his own Mennonite denomination, challenging his fellow Mennonites in leadership posts, conference speeches, and denominational publications to "listen to newer Anabaptist voices" in this increasingly "globalized environment." Matthew Soerens, a Church Training Specialist with World Relief and the co-author of *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate* is another excellent example of this network strategy. Working with others at World Relief and the Evangelical Immigration Table, Soerens helped recruit the 11 Evangelical organizations who now form the coalition. He then helped develop practical tools like the "I was a Stranger Challenge: 40 Days of Scripture and Prayer on Immigration," and organized "Preaching Immigration" Sundays. Countless denominations and networks have passed along these resources to their constituents, resulting in high levels of participation and engagement that would otherwise not be possible without the legitimizing effect of the overarching coalition.

CONCLUSION

Traditionally known as a "nation of immigrants," the United States has continued to live up to its name. With increasing amounts of immigrants from new nations imbedding into more and more unsuspecting places in America's "heartland," immigration will remain a hot-button issue for the foreseeable future. Tapping into this trend, researchers and academics from a broad host of fields continue to address immigration, albeit usually only from within their specific fields and presuppositions. However, recent scholarship contends that in order to best understand the complexities of immigration, researchers must be *interdisciplinary,* working with a *transnational gaze*, and with a special focus on the forgotten area of *religion*. As a field of study, missiology inherently meets these criterion, making it uniquely equipped and able to understand immigration. However, this ability is not reflected among "normal" Christians—a group who shows significant ignorance and problematic thinking on this issue. Therefore, if missiology does indeed strive to be practical and not just theoretical, it is also uniquely responsible for engaging and instructing Christians on immigration, primarily through the means of the local church. This will require practical and active missiologists who are engaging actual congregations, building bridges between believers of different cultures, and strategically working at the denominational and network level in order to have the biggest impact.

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